

Characteristics of Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, the First American Political Parties

- * Jefferson and Republicans supported France, liberty, and reason.
- * Hamilton and Federalists supported order, religious faith, and Britain.

Upon creation of the Constitution, the Founding Fathers had no idea that the nation would soon be divided by political parties. However, political parties seem to be a necessary evil, as they allow people to base their votes on issues they feel strongly about and have a voice in the government through the political party they support. As the Federalists, comprised mostly of those who wrote and supported the Constitution, gained momentum in the early years of the government, a group sprung out that had contrasting ideas. This group, led by Jefferson and Madison, called themselves the Democratic-Republicans. The Federalists and Democratic-Republicans derived their opinions from the same clause of the Constitution, although they interpreted it differently and had different views on the role of the federal government in relation to the state governments. The Federalists believed that the federal government had all powers that were not denied to it, while the Democratic-Republicans argued that the powers that were not reserved for the federal government belonged to the states. The clashing of interpretations of the Constitution led to disagreements between the groups about states' rights and the creation of a national bank.

The first major division of the party occurred when Hamilton's financial program was proposed. As Washington's Secretary of Treasury, Hamilton wrote a "Report on the Public Credit" which planned liberal methods in which to pay off Revolutionary War debts. In it, he stated that the federal government should assume all state debts and then pay off their war debts at face value. This would benefit those who had bought currency at its depreciated value, who would then be able to redeem it at face value. The Democratic-Republicans did not think this was a fair plan because most of the money had been bought up by rich speculators, and the common man would not benefit at all from the paying off of debts. Hamilton also proposed that the government create a national bank, which was immediately objected to by the Democratic-Republicans on the grounds that the Constitution does not give the federal government the power to create a national bank. Hamilton cited Article I, Section 8, which allows Congress to make "all Laws which shall be necessary and proper." Since the bank, in his eyes, is both necessary and proper, then it is constitutional to create it. Jefferson believed that since the creation of banks was a power not specifically assigned to the national government, then it is reserved for the states, as stated in the 10th Amendment. Since Washington sided with Hamilton on all of these proposals, they were instituted and Jefferson was left in the dust.

The French Revolution further split the parties as they took sides with the opposing powers. Although America was officially proclaimed to be neutral, most Americans felt strongly one way or the other. Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans were very pro-French, praising the new French republican government which provided the French people with a voice in their government. They celebrated the beheading of King Louis XVI, as he was an aristocratic ruler, similar to what they saw in the very strong federal government that was springing out of Hamilton's financial plans. Citizen Genet, a French ambassador, ventured to the United States to try to build support for France's entry into a war with Britain and Spain. He was warmly welcomed by the Democratic-Republicans,

but Washington refused to meet with him, which led Jefferson to resign as Secretary of State. The Federalists were pro-British in this conflict, supporting the strong hand Britain was trying to place on France during their time of upheaval and unrest.

The first major political move by the Democratic-Republicans came after the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. These pieces of legislature allowed foreigners to be deported and restricted the rights of by forbidding the publication of anything that attacked the government. Jefferson believed these were completely unconstitutional, as the Sedition Act prohibited free speech that was guaranteed in the first amendment. Madison and Jefferson wrote resolutions for Kentucky and Virginia that nullified the Alien and Sedition Acts. These were the first stand for state rights through the concept of nullification. Jefferson believed that the states should have the power to refuse to enforce laws that are obviously outside the powers granted to the federal government by the Constitution. This issue of nullification and states rights remained in the political sphere for the next century, proving to be one of the causes of the sectionalism demonstrated before the Civil War.

Jefferson and his Democratic-Republicans objected to the Federalists' loose interpretation of the Constitution that allowed the federal government to use powers not explicitly given to it. They believed that the states should have more rights, which would be a protection against a tyrannical ruler of the federal government. They used the example of a new government in France as a way to demonstrate their approval for fully Republican government, and they sought to model America after the new French Republic. The Federalists remained strong, and since they had the presidency during the first crucial years of the nation, they were able to implement many laws and policies which gave power to the central government. The Democratic-Republicans objected to the laws that they felt were unconstitutional by introducing the concept of nullification, which divided the nation into two distinct political parties.

Washington named Chief Justice John Jay as special envoy to great Britain, and he managed to negotiate a treaty. **(Jay Treaty of 1794):**

- Britain received most favored nation trading status with America.
- America promised not to outfit French privateers.
- Britain need not pay compensation for slaves removed during Revolution.
- Old American debts to British merchants would be honored.
- Britain evacuated posts in Northwest Territories.
- Britain paid reparations for American vessels seized.

Jay's Treaty was very unpopular, particularly with Republicans, who were itching to join up with France. Southern Planters were particularly incensed that they received no compensation for slaves carried away during the Revolution. In the end, it passed with the narrowest of margins.

Whiskey Rebellion 1794-angered farmers. Pg. 186 in textbook.